

Don't throw a Panda in the bullion pot

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—A few weeks ago you said that Australia would be the first large country to market a platinum "bullion coin." Earlier this year I bought a Chinese "Panda" made of platinum. Isn't China a "large country"?

R. W., Addison

A—Most of China's "Pandas" don't qualify as bullion coinage, despite what some advertisements imply. The coins usually command special premiums as collectibles because of their small mintages. Governments produce bullion coins in unlimited quantities for precious-metal investors. Sold for the price of the metal and a small sales commission, they normally have no collector value.

Q—I want to get my 16 grand-

children interested in coin collecting. Can you give me some ideas? The ages range from 3 to 14.

O. B., Apple River, Ill.

A—Give each child a handful of old coins. You could buy dozens of Indian-head cents or liberty-head nickels for less than 75 cents each.

Also give the older children a basic hobby reference, such as "A Guide Book of United States Coins" by R.S. Yeoman. The 1989 edition costs \$6.95. With such gifts, some of your grandchildren are bound to catch the coin collecting bug.

Q—Do dates on coins represent the year of production?

G. M., Chicago

A—Almost always. The rare exceptions are caused by coin shortages or other unusual events. For example, the government made many silver coins dated 1964 in 1965 during a

shortage created in part by rising silver prices.

Q—Is there any significance to the fact that Abe Lincoln on the penny faces right while the presidents on our other coins face left?

G. W., Chicago

A—No; it's merely a coincidence.